

NSC BRIEFING

15 January 1958

LAOS

- I. Implementation of the 18 November agreement between the Laotian government and the Communist Pathet Lao is proceeding without incident, but in a rather haphazard manner with the Pathet Lao evading full compliance with some provisions.
 - A. One week before the 18 January deadline for implementing the military part of the agreement, only 4,000 of the estimated 7,500 Pathet troops have reported for processing at the integration centers.
 - B. Of remaining 3,500 about 2,800 expected to return to home villages with arms, while rest will go into banditry or cross over to North Vietnam.
 - C. Pathets also have shipped out all modern arms to North Vietnam rather than surrender them to Laotian army.
- II. Despite ceremonies marking turnover of authority in the two disputed provinces, government control is still only symbolic.
 - A. To date the only functionaries appointed by the royal government are the governor of Sam Neua and the deputy governor of Phong Saly; both are undistinguished civil servants, *but probably loyal.*
 - B. In late December, Pathet cadres in Sam Neua reportedly were telling population that armed conflict over but political war to continue and there no need to obey any officials other than Pathets.

C. Pathets, however, have switched from military to predominantly legal and semi-legal political campaign, and movement of 5 Laotian Army battalions into two provinces on 19 January expected to be unopposed.

1. Once these battalions in place government officials will move in on large scale.

III. Pathet Lao concentrating on campaign for critical 4 May elections to add 20 seats to the present 39 in the national assembly.

A. Top echelon Pathet leaders including cabinet members in present coalition, Souphannouvong and Phoumi, reportedly were registered as election candidates as of 6 January.

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IV. Souvanna Phouma and other conservative leaders are aware of necessity of limiting Pathet electoral gains.

A. The leading conservative parties--the Nationalists and Independents--have a draft agreement on united front during campaign.

1. Small (3 seats) Democratic Party showing signs of breaking unnatural alliance with left-wing front and gravitating toward campaign cooperation with conservative.

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- B. The Laotian Army command intends to use army's psychological warfare capabilities for helping government restrict Pathet gains in electoral campaign.
- C. Nevertheless, at this time Pathets seem to have greater political "know-how" and organization for a grass roots campaign.

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